

Recommendations of the Corrections Advisory Council Subcommittee *August 2006*

At the Nov. 5, 2005, meeting of the Corrections Advisory Council, Chairman and Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger appointed a six-member subcommittee to study prison overcrowding and make recommendations about how to take the pressure off of the system. The subcommittee focused on increasing community corrections programs and services as a means of diverting offenders from prison, paying particular attention to special-needs populations such as drug offenders, sex offenders and the mentally ill. We looked at the needs of offenders before, during and after their incarceration, in order to improve the continuum of care and treatment, in hopes of reducing the recidivism rate. We also were aware that the native American population is over-represented in the system, and that the women's population is rising more quickly than the male population. Native Americans have a tougher time navigating the system than white inmates, and both the native American and women populations are on the rise due to drug offenses. Taking all of these factors into consideration, the committee makes the following recommendations, which are aimed at improving the system and the offenders' chances of success in the community.

The members are Rep. Gail Gutsche, Missoula, chairwoman; Sens. Mike Cooney, Helena, and Jim Shockley, Victor; Reps. Tim Callahan, Great Falls, and Veronica Small-Eastman, Lodge Grass; Cascade County Sheriff Dave Castle; and Toole County Commissioner Alan Underdal.

The subcommittee met seven times: Jan. 5, Jan. 31, Feb. 27, March 31, May 8, June 19 and Aug. 1.

The following summarize the subcommittee's recommendations to the Corrections Advisory Council for its consideration.

They are listed in order of priority as established by the subcommittee members.

NOTE: Each recommendation is categorized as to whether it would affect offenders **BEFORE** prison, **DURING** their prison term or **AFTER** release from prison.

1. Modify and expand, particularly in rural areas, the existing system in which district judges operate drug courts and mental health courts to create dual-purpose "treatment courts" capable of handling those with both drug addiction problems and emotional/mental disorders. This would address the fact that many offenders experience both afflictions and many of those with mental health problems are reluctant to submit themselves to a "mental health court" because of the stigma.
(BEFORE)

2. Create a program that offers financial incentives for local governments to increase community-based services for offenders. The money would be paid to governments based on an established formula, such as the year-over-year reduction in the number of offenders committed to prison from a particular judicial district. The program would need an initial appropriation, although future funding could come from the money saved by the Department of Corrections due to reduced inmate admissions. **(BEFORE, AFTER)**
3. Provide a stipend for a lengthy enough period of time (suggested at least three months) after an offender is released from prison to help them restart their lives. The current release stipend of \$100 is clearly not enough for a homeless, jobless offender to get restarted. This money, which would be administered by the offender's parole officer, would be used to help a person with critical expenses such as those related to housing, job-hunting and necessities of life. The DOC would pay bills, such as rent and restitution, directly to the vendors. **(AFTER)**
4. Create separate registries to distinguish violent offenders from sexual offenders. **(BEFORE, DURING, AFTER)**
5. Change the way sexual offenders are categorized and allow lower-risk offenders to have their names removed sooner from the sex offender registry. **(BEFORE, DURING, AFTER)**
6. Develop criteria for, and create, adult "guide homes." This would be similar to a program already in place for juvenile offenders. These are private homes where residents are willing to take in an adult offender and offer him or her positive role models and mentoring that will put them on the right track. **(BEFORE, AFTER)**
7. Employ mental health counselors and case managers in prisons to better prepare offenders for release by helping identify community mental health services that are available and to ensure a continuum of care for offenders once they are released. **(DURING)**
8. Transform the state Board of Pardons and Parole into a professional board composed of members who are full-time, salaried state employees. This would replace the current board structure in which members are appointed by the governor and serve in part-time positions. This concept would make it more feasible for the board to consider some type of early-release program. **(DURING)**
9. Increase sex offender treatment capacity in prison so that inmates do not have to wait long periods for mandatory treatment before they can be paroled. **(DURING)**

10. Request the Workforce Development Task Force put greater emphasis on filling the need for more sex offender therapists and other professionals capable of providing increased community treatment opportunities to offenders. Also, sex offenders must be connected with ongoing individual and group therapy opportunities upon release from prison. This recognizes that, like alcoholics, sex offenders will need ongoing support throughout their lives. **(AFTER)**
11. Each prison should hire case managers who help out-going inmates locate and navigate wrap-around community services needed for their ongoing recovery. Currently, this service is being performed by parole officers who are already overwhelmed with huge workloads and may not be familiar with all of the available and necessary services. **(DURING)**
12. The DOC should establish workload standards and that case managers “specialize” in working with specific populations such as sex offenders or the mentally ill. **(AFTER)**
13. (tie)
 - The DOC, or some entity hired by DOC, should create a comprehensive database of available offender services and their locations. **(BEFORE, DURING, AFTER)**
 - Pre-sentence investigation forms should be changed to gather more specific information in order to better quantify and serve the population. Also, PSIs should be completed sooner. **(BEFORE)**
15. Offenders convicted of a drug offense have special housing needs upon release because they are not eligible for most of the available federal Section 8 housing. Government should provide subsidized housing and identify landlords willing to rent to this population. **(AFTER)**